

DOE adds tours of Paducah plant

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Staff report



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Participants in the inaugural tour April 23 of the U.S. Department of Energy's Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant stand inside the C-300 Central Control Building. Additional tours have been added due to community response.

The U.S. Department of Energy has added some tours of the Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant to its previously announced schedule due to strong response from the community.

The DOE announced the tours April 1, marking the first time in the plant's more than 60-year history the public has been given the opportunity to go inside the fenced-in facility.

"When we planned the community tour program, we were unsure of the interest the tours would generate," said Jennifer Woodard, DOE's Paducah site lead. "We have been delighted with the turnout. After the first five tours filled up in only a couple of weeks, we added three additional tours to accommodate the demand."

The free tours are available on a first-come, first-served basis. Attendees must be 18 or older to participate.

"There are only a few spots left," said Robert "Buz" Smith, from DOE's Paducah site office. "So people should hurry if they're interested in attending a tour this year."

Tour participants are required to attend an orientation at the West Kentucky Community and Technical College's Emerging Technology Building before boarding buses to take them to and from the plant. Morning tours begin with orientation at 8 a.m. with participants returning by noon. Afternoon tours begin with orientation at 11:30 a.m., with a return to the college at 3:30 p.m.

Tour spots currently available are: June 25 (afternoon), registration deadline June 12; July 16 (morning), registration deadline July 3; Aug. 20 (morning), registration deadline Aug. 7; Sept. 17 (morning and afternoon), registration deadline Sept. 4.

The tours are being coordinated by the Fluor Paducah Deactivation Project's public affairs office. To register for one of the remaining tours, go to www.ffspaducah.com.

Some of the tour participants have been former plant workers, like Eugene Waggoner, 95, who started working at the plant in 1952.

"The scope of the project is amazing," Waggoner said.

"It was a pleasure to come back to see the building I worked in after all of these years."

During more than 60 years of operation that ended in 2013, the Paducah plant enriched uranium for national defense and later for commercial energy purposes. It is currently being prepared for decontamination and decommissioning while environmental cleanup continues.

The plant is seen as a significant economic asset to the region and a key part of the area's heritage, according to the DOE.

"We are pleased that the community is taking an interest in the site's history and ongoing work," said Woodard.